



Bermuda Audubon Society NEWSLETTER

P O Box HM 1328, Hamilton HMFx

Summer
1994

Vol 5 No 2

The Bermuda Audubon Society was established in 1954 and incorporated in 1960 with power to acquire and hold land in trust for conservation purposes. It is a membership governed, non-profit registered charity - with the objectives being:

1 To arouse through education, public recognition of the value of and need for protecting wild birds and animals, plants, soil, and water as well as the interdependence of these natural resources.

2 To cooperate as occasion prompts, with conservation agencies, and with private associations devoted to the interests of conservation and to educate in the field of natural resources.

3 To engage in such educational, scientific, literary, historical, philanthropic and charitable pursuits as may be part of the aforementioned objectives.

A Brief History

Bermuda Audubon is patterned after the National Audubon Society of America, and named in honour of the famous American naturalist and artist John James Audubon. The local society became established in 1954 in an effort to change the (then) Government policy of using marshlands as garbage disposal sites.

A group of concerned citizens with an interest in natural history, including Mr. David Wingate, the late Mr. Louis Mowbray (then the curator of the Aquarium), Mr. Stanley Gascoigne, the late Mrs. Patricia Benbow and Mrs. "Mabs" Cooper founded the Bermuda Audubon Society in order to put pressure on the Government to change its

thinking on garbage disposal. It was the first local conservation organization to launch public fund raising drives for the purchase of marshlands and other unique Bermudian habitats for nature reserves.

Bermuda Audubon's 40th Anniversary

Since 1963, Audubon has acquired twelve nature reserves totalling over 40 acres, by purchase, gift, bequest and lease. Since 1972 it has undertaken major restoration and landscaping works on some of these reserves, including the rehabilitation of marshland and ponds which had earlier been filled in

as garbage dump sites. Somerset Long Bay Reserve and Stokes Point Reserve are notable examples.

On the education side, the Society for many years sponsored the National Audubon Society Wildlife and Conservation Films/Lectures, (now discontinued) including regular matinee performances for the local schools. It continues to sponsor field trips and conservation of natural history lectures, advertised through its quarterly newsletter and local newspapers.

Since 1972 the Society has sponsored and organised an annual summer course and camp on Bermuda Natural History for advanced level secondary school students from all Bermuda secondary schools. This field course based at Nonsuch Island is available by application for a limited number of students and involves an intensive week of lectures by scientists from the Bermuda Biological Station, Government Departments and elsewhere. It also includes practical laboratory sessions and field trips to all of Bermuda's most interesting nature reserves, including North Rock. The benefit of this course

A Brief History Cont'd

to the Bermuda community in the long run is now being realised, as many of the course graduates were inspired to pursue careers here in conservation or education related positions. The Society looks forward to its next 40 years!

Anniversary Dinner

Over 100 members and friends gathered at the Hamilton Princess Hotel on May 20th to celebrate the Audubon Society's fortieth anniversary.

Following a sumptuous meal, two special awards were made by The Premier, Sir John Swan. Firstly, to Ted Cassidy in recognition of being the Society's treasurer for 25 years! He was given an honorary life membership. Secondly, to David Wingate who has never been officially recognised by the Audubon Society despite numerous international honours and awards. He was presented with a decanter with an engraved collar in recognition of his services to conservation, his lifetime commitment to the Cahow, and for 40 years voluntary work for the Audubon Society.

Our guest speaker for the evening was Mr. Kenn Kaufman, Associate Editor for *American Birds*. He spoke on the "Future of Nature Study and Birding in the 21st Century." His reputation of being a most entertaining speaker certainly proved to be true. Widely regarded as one of the top ornithologists in North America, he has recently written a book in the Peterson Field Guide series entitled 'Advanced Birding.'

Bermuda Audubon Society

HOTLINE

238-3239

bird news
society business
environmental concerns

Annual General Meeting

Mr. Andrew Dobson completed his two year term as President of the society and handed over the presidency to Mr. Jeremy Madeiros.

The following 1994-95 Executive Committee was elected:

<i>President</i>	Jeremy Madeiros
<i>Vice-President</i>	Andrew Dobson
<i>Treasurer</i>	Ted Cassidy
<i>Secretary</i>	Gerry Odisio
<i>Members:</i>	Leila Madeiros David O'Neill
	Penny Soares Helge Trapnell
	David Wallace David Wingate

Following the AGM Eric Amos showed some fascinating video footage of birdlife in and around Bermuda.

1994 Bermuda Spring

by Andrew Dobson

Highlights of this Spring have included attempted breeding by **Pied-billed Grebes**, and sightings of **Brown Pelican**, **Swallow-tailed Kites**, **Sooty Tern**, **Red Crossbill** and the long-staying **Sandhill Crane** and **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks**.

(See separate table for dates)

Pied-billed Grebes built a nest at Pitman's Pond. Unfortunately the nest failed, but it is the first breeding attempt since 1987. Most wildfowl migrates north in the Spring but the two **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** (which only breed as far north as the southern USA) were still present at the Cloverdale pond in June. At the same location was a splendidly plumaged drake **Ring-necked Duck** (the first to occur in May or June) and a third duck species - a female **Greater Scaup** was a surprise arrival in June - also finding its way to Cloverdale!

The only way to really appreciate the huge seabird migration is to take a boat about 5 miles off the South Shore. **Shearwaters**, **petrels**, **jaegers** and **terns** are all passing Bermuda, travelling across

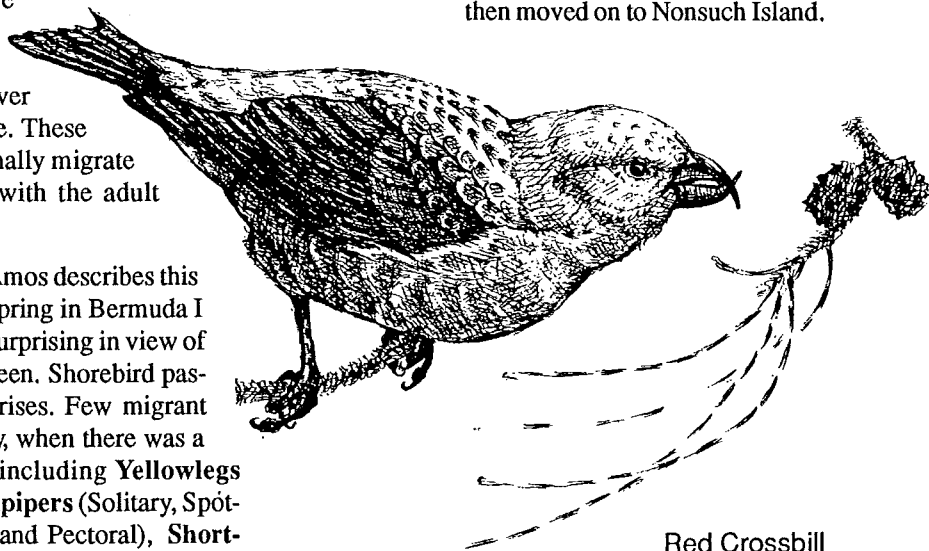
the Atlantic. Those with the time and a strong stomach were rewarded with some good sightings this Spring. A **Manx Shearwater** on 28 January and a **Sooty Shearwater** on 11 April were the earliest ever recorded - but numbers of these and other pelagic species do not peak until later in the spring. Noteworthy counts included 37 **Leach's Storm-Petrels** on 28 April and 38 **Sooty Shearwaters** on the pelagic trip with Kenn Kaufman on 21 May. **Greater Shearwaters** do not peak until June, and on some days with favourable weather and viewing conditions it was possible to observe an average of one per minute from the South Shore. The most exciting seabird was undoubtedly a **Sooty Tern** seen only by Steven DeSilva in Castle Harbour. A bird that spends most of its life over tropical seas, it has not been recorded here since 1969!

A **Brown Pelican** was first seen at Harrington Sound but for most of its week's stay it was to be found around Pearl Island in the Great Sound. The **Sandhill Crane** was not seen after 15 May, having delighted scores of people during its stay of over seven months. Probably as many as five **Swallow-tailed Kites** were present in March - frequently seen hunting over golf courses and catching lizards which they invariably ate in mid-air. On 18 April two immature **Common Terns** returning with our breeding terns in Harrington Sound has never been observed here before. These first-year birds do not normally migrate to the breeding grounds with the adult terns.

It is sad to report that Eric Amos describes this year as "by far the worst Spring in Bermuda I have witnessed" - but not surprising in view of the low number of birds seen. Shorebird passage brought no real surprises. Few migrant species arrived before May, when there was a small influx of species, including **Yellowlegs** (Greater and Lesser), **Sandpipers** (Solitary, Spotted, Semipalmated, Least and Pectoral), **Short-billed Dowitcher** and **Ruff**. The latter species

comes from Europe, and although two females or **Reeves** wintered in Bermuda - the magnificently plumaged male **Ruff** seen at Spittal Pond was really impressive.

A **Tree Swallow** on 26 February may well be the earliest Spring record, but most swallow species were not commonly seen until late April and May. Eight **Bank Swallows** at Spittal Pond Farm on 17 May is almost certainly a record count for a single day in Spring. There were only a few sightings of a number of species which are far more common in the Fall, such as **Common Nighthawk**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Yellow-throated Vireo**, **Red-eyed Vireo**, **Summer and Scarlet Tanager**, and **Bobolink**. A male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at Hog Bay on 5 March was possibly the earliest ever recorded. Spring warblers were alarmingly absent - a **Prothonotary Warbler** on 5 March was the earliest ever recorded while an **Ovenbird** found by Kenn Kaufman on 19 May was the latest ever recorded. Two **Orange-crowned Warblers** seen by Eric Amos on 4 April provided new Spring records. **Kentucky Warbler** is almost unheard of in Spring, so one found by David Wallace at Coral Beach was most unexpected. Finally, a **Red Crossbill** at Spittal Pond on 2 April was a great find for David Wingate, and probably the same bird then moved on to Nonsuch Island.



Red Crossbill
Illustration by Wendy Frith

Harbour and Islands Audubon Field Trip

by Michael Russell

Many visitors marvel at Bermuda's fauna and flora - but few have the opportunity to recount their experience afterwards in Bermuda. The following is an extract of Michael Russell's visit to Bermuda which appeared in the newsletter of the Birmingham Audubon Society (Alabama). His visit coincided with the society's fieldtrip aboard Joffre Pitman's glass-bottomed boat. (Many thanks Joffre!)

Recently, I had the chance to spend a long weekend in Bermuda. You may not believe it, but it was actually a working weekend, the occasion being a small specialist scientific meeting (which I can prove if need be, but for now just take my word for it!)

The organizer had the good sense to arrange that we had afternoons off, so what does a birder do finding himself marooned on the world's northernmost coral atoll, but get in touch with the local Audubon Society! In this case it was particularly easy, because as some of you may know, a former Birmingham Audubonite, Barbara White now lives there, and so I let her know I would be coming.

Timing was perfect, as that Saturday afternoon Bermuda Audubon had arranged a boat trip around the Great Sound and its numerous small islands, and as everywhere Audubonites are not only great birders but also delightful people. So on a rather blustery February afternoon some 30 of us, including Barbara and myself boarded what at other seasons was a glass-bottomed boat, only this one, the owner apologized, had not been cleaned off after the winter season, and all we could see in that direction was the accumulated encrustation of barnacles and sea-anemones. Unfortunately a storm system had stalled out over the Bahamas way to the south, and this led to overcast but mild weather

What did we see?

Not a large number of species of course, as Bermuda, being 600 miles north out to sea, has only some 20 resident species, and they are the common ones of North America, like Cardinals, Mourning Doves, Crows and the ubiquitous camp-followers of humans (House Sparrows, Starlings and Rock Doves). In migration a good number of North American migrant warblers turn up, but it was too early for that. Most surprising were Kiskadees, those distinctive rufous and yellow flycatchers from Mexico and further south, which were introduced to Bermuda some time ago to in a misplaced effort at biological control, and have now increased to what is locally regarded as nuisance proportions. Now it may be a matter of taste and familiarity, but I would take Kiskadees over Starlings or House Sparrows any day!

There were seabirds of course, Double-crested Cormorants and plenty of gulls of the North Atlantic species like Ring-bills, Herring, Great and Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed. This last threw me at first, despite it being the commonest inland gull in Britain in winter, as I had forgotten its best field mark, which is not a black head (not in winter plumage) but the white leading edge to the wing. Most remarkable was an all white gull which turned out to be an Iceland Gull. No terns at all, perhaps it was too early for them, as it was for the "Longtails" or White-tailed Tropicbirds, which are Bermudians' favourite.

I asked about the Cahow

What's a Cahow, I hear you ask; a sort of cahattle is one answer (and it goes "mahoo") but to birders it is the endemic Bermuda Petrel which had been thought extinct since the 17th century until it was rediscovered in 1951 nesting in a burrow on an island in Castle Harbour. I was in the right company to find out, because David Wingate was on board. He is the Government Conservation Officer, and has made it his life's work to restore Nonsuch Island, one of the islands in Castle Harbour, to its natural state. The whole island is a nature reserve and David lives there. The Cahows were indeed

nesting - they have been provided with some artificial burrows to help protect them against introduced rats and other ground predators, which are one major factor in their historic decline. For the rest of the year they are at sea, no-one knows where, and they return only here, to Bermuda once a year to breed, landing by night.

Another of David's success stories is the reintroduction of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, which he determined had historically bred in Bermuda. We saw several splendid adults with breeding plumes on the boat trip, as well as Great Blue and Tricoloured Herons, and Great and Snowy Egrets. We saw few shorebirds, though, apart from several Ruddy Turnstones which are common around the harbour areas, and some Black-bellied Plovers. A pair of Snow Geese that had wintered on the island was unexpected (one had been returned to health by the Bermuda Aquarium and Zoo after being injured). The last surprise on the trip came towards the end of the afternoon as we made our way back to Hamilton Harbour past a small cliff with numerous small caves and rock ledges facing out to sea. Here resided a pair of Barn Owls, and as we bobbed in the water a few yards away, we could train our binoculars into one of these cavities and see them, one in full view.

On Sunday afternoon, after a substantial lunch that I afterwards learnt was a traditional Bermuda Sunday breakfast - boiled salted codfish with potatoes, hard boiled eggs, spicy onion-tomato sauce and a banana - we had a tour of the main island of Bermuda. A stop at Spittal Pond nature reserve revealed a few ducks, herons and a Moorhen, but not what we were hoping for, some early Longtails. There was a flock of Rock Doves in their natural environment, sea cliffs, for a change, a pair of Eastern Bluebirds and some Common Ground-doves among the trees. By now rain was threatening, and we turned back, stopping to explore some smuggler's caves in the grounds of the Old Admiralty House of all places! Bermuda is, as Barbara puts it a "fantasy island", somehow, I think I will be back, perhaps when the sun is shining and the

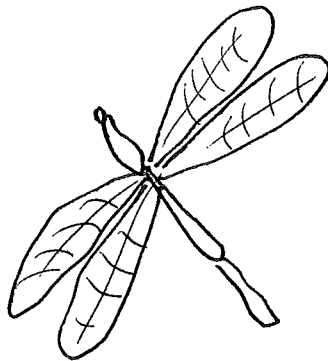
weather a bit warmer, Next time, I hope to track down some Longtails, and maybe the Cahow.

Many thanks indeed to the Bermuda Audubon for letting me join their boat trip.

New Dragonfly Record for Bermuda

Eric Amos found a Double-ringed Pennant *Celithemis verna* at Fort Scaur on 7 April 1994.

This species of dragonfly is found in the United States from New Jersey to North Florida and west to East Texas.

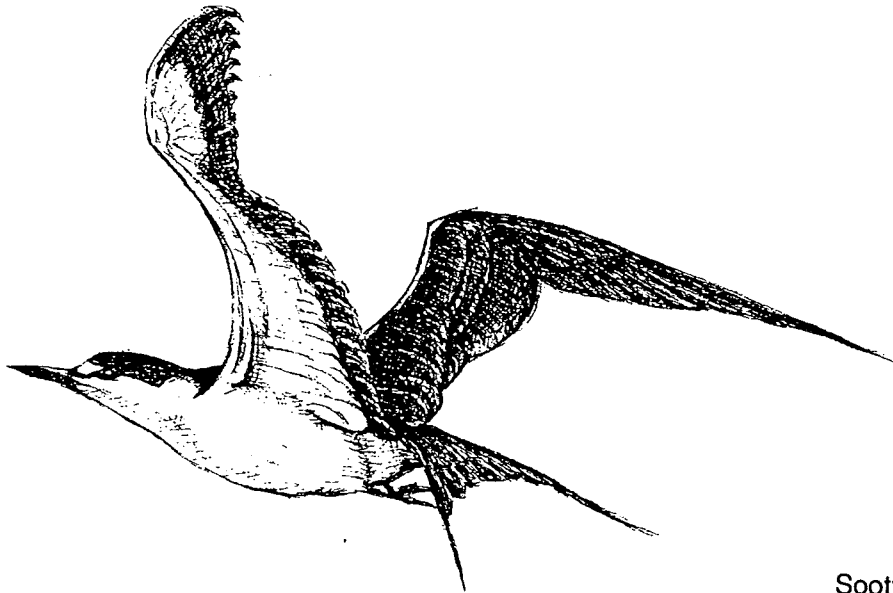


Spring Bird Dates 1994

SPRING 1994	FIRST DATE	LAST DATE	SPRING 1994	FIRST DATE	LAST DATE
Double-crested Cormorant	*	16.4	Sanderling	*	19.3
American Bittern	*	14.3	Semipalmated Sandpiper	20.5	31.5
Least Bittern	*	16.4	Least Sandpiper	18.4	29.5
Great Blue Heron	*	June	White-rumped Sandpiper	28.5	30.5
Great Egret	*	June	Pectoral Sandpiper	11.4	12.5
Snowy Egret	*	June	Ruff	1.3 (EA)	30.5
Little Blue Heron	*	3.6	Short-billed Dowitcher	9.5	30.5
Tricolored Heron	*	17.4	Common Snipe	*	5.5
Cattle Egret	*	June	Pomarine Jaeger	28.4	28.4
Green Heron	*	10.6	Parasitic Jaeger	30.4	30.4
Black-crowned Night-Heron	*	8.3	Long-tailed Jaeger	28.4	8.5
Glossy Ibis	Present throughout		Laughing Gull	1.4	June
Fulvous Whistling-Duck	*	4.6	Ring-billed Gull	*	24.4
Snow Goose	*	19.2	Herring Gull	*	20.3
Canada Goose	*	14.4	Lesser Black-backed Gull	*	20.3
Wood Duck	*	18.2	Great Black-backed Gull	*	June
Green-winged Teal	*	24.4	Common Tern	27.3	June
Blue-winged Teal	*	25.4	Arctic Tern	28.4	8.5
Northern Shoveler	*	23.4	Sooty Tern	31.5 (SD)	31.5
American Wigeon	*	8.5	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	April	13.6
Ring-necked Duck	*	June	Common Nighthawk	19.4	14.5
Greater Scaup	26.5 (AD/PS)	June	Chimney Swift	17.5	24.5
Lesser Scaup	*	5.4	Belted Kingfisher	*	24.4
Hooded Merganser	*	2.4	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	23.3	1.4
Osprey	17.3	June	Purple Martin	6.3	21.5
American Swallow-tailed Kite	6.3	10.4	Tree Swallow	26.2 (AD/DW)	15.5
American Kestrel	14.3	5.4	Bank Swallow	21.4	17.5
Merlin	*	23.5	Cliff Swallow	13.3	13.3
Sora	*	17.4	Barn Swallow	22.4	4.6
Purple Gallinule	*	29.5	American Pipit	*	6.3
American Coot	*	23.4	Cedar Waxwing	*	5.5
Caribbean Coot	* nest building	May	Hermit Thrush	*	25.3
Sandhill Crane	* (AD/PH/PS)	15.5	Yellow-throated Vireo	24.4	24.4
Black-bellied Plover	*	May	Red-eyed Vireo	24.4	24.4
Killdeer	*	23.3	Blue-winged Warbler	*	7.4
Greater Yellowlegs	24.5	30.5	Orange-crowned Warbler	4.4 (EA)	5.4
Lesser Yellowlegs	20.5	28.5	Nashville Warbler	*	6.4
Solitary Sandpiper	22.5	25.5	Northern Parula	*	18.4
Spotted Sandpiper	20.5	25.5	Magnolia Warbler		24.4
Ruddy Turnstone	*	4.5	Cape May Warbler	*	16.4
Whimbrel	*	12.5	Black-throated Blue Warbler*		22.4

SPRING 1994	FIRST DATE	LAST DATE	SPRING 1994	FIRST DATE	LAST DATE
Yellow-rumped Warbler	*	14.4	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	5.3 (AD)	25.5
Black-throated Green Warbler*		17.4	Blue Grosbeak	6.3	23.4
Yellow-throated Warbler	*	5.4	Indigo Bunting	*	27.4
Pine Warbler	*	March	Savannah Sparrow	*	16.4
Prairie Warbler	*	7.4	Dark-eyed Junco	2.4	2.4
Palm Warbler	*	14.4	Bobolink	13.5	15.5
Black-and-white Warbler	*	26.4	Northern Oriole	27.3	19.4
American Redstart	*	1.5	Red Crossbill	1.4 (DBW)	12.4
Prothonotary Warbler	5.3 (AD)	3.4			
Worm-eating Warbler	*	26.4			
Ovenbird	*	(KK)20.5			
Northern Waterthrush	*	17.4			
Louisiana Waterthrush	21.4	22.4			
Kentucky Warbler	7.4 (DW)	8.4			
Common Yellowthroat	*	15.4			
Hooded Warbler	*	16.4			
Summer Tanager	24.4	24.4			
Scarlet Tanager	25.4	25.4			

* present since Fall or Winter.
 Significant records are noted with the observers initials. Many thanks to those who have submitted details of their sightings: Eric Amos (EA), Steven DeSilva (SD), Andrew Dobson (AD), Andrew Harford, Peter Holmes (PH), Kenn Kaufmann (KK), Jeremy Madeiros, Penny Soares (PS), David Wallace, Paul Watson, David Wingate (DBW).



Sooty Tern
 Illustration by Wendy Frith

Future Events

Saturday - Saturday
June 25 - July 2

Audubon Natural History Camp
Nonsuch Island and various habitats
(Year 4 Secondary school students)

Sunday
September 11

Field Trip - NONSUCH ISLAND
Time: 08.45 hrs. or 12.45 hrs.
Depart from the Bermuda Biological Station
(Reservations from 1st September)
236-3737 or 293-6153

Friday - Sunday
Sept 30 - Oct 2

Birding Weekend - PAGET ISLAND
Time: 18.00 hrs. Friday - depart Ordnance Is.
Details from 238-3239

If undelivered please return to:

Bermuda Audubon Society
P O Box HM 1328
Hamilton HMFX

